

News From _____

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BYRD MEETS WITH NEW EDUCATION SECRETARY

Washington, DC --- Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., continued his outreach to the new Cabinet officials in the Obama Administration by meeting with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in his Capitol office on Monday, February 23.

Byrd voiced his strongest concerns to the Secretary over the increasing use and abuse of drugs and alcohol by school-age young people, citing statistics that seventy percent of teenagers have consumed alcohol, forty-seven percent have used marijuana, and twenty-four percent have tried some other illegal drug by the completion of high school. Byrd was particularly alarmed that West Virginia is among the top ten states in the nation with the highest rates of abuse of non-medical use of pain relievers and cocaine among youth and young adults. Secretary Duncan told Byrd that this will be one of the toughest issues confronting him as Education Secretary and one, where he forthrightly indicated to Byrd, that he does not have an easy answer. Secretary Duncan and Byrd agreed to work together to address this issue in hopes of seeking new solutions that go beyond funding.

Byrd also encouraged the Secretary to take a good look at opportunities to strengthen community colleges and vocational schools throughout the nation. Byrd noted the growth of these two types of institutions in West Virginia and their need for additional space and facilities, to help to provide needed learning skills for those in West Virginia who are looking to enter the workforce immediately upon completing coursework in high paying jobs such as operating heavy machinery and working in underground mines.

Byrd also suggested that the Secretary renew efforts to ensure that teachers are teaching classes in which they have degrees. Byrd noted a Time magazine report in 2008 that found about one-third of middle school and high school classes are taught by teachers who did not major in a subject closely related to the one they were teaching. Secretary Duncan noted that there is an extreme shortage of math and science teachers in the school systems and that he will examine ways to try and increase the number of teachers going into those fields.

Byrd noted that Duncan is a dynamic, young Secretary who seems determined to try new ideas and initiatives at the Department of Education which will hopefully lead to improvements in the limited role the federal government plays in education policy in the States.

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